

Emotional well-being tips during severe weather events

Hurricane Fiona in September 2023 reminded us all of the power of mother nature and that we shouldn't take our comfort and security for granted. As hurricane season returns, it is normal that those who were previously affected by severe weather events, such as Fiona, are worried about a repeat.

As University Emergency Preparedness staff work with municipal and provincial counterparts to keep the community safe, the Department of Student Affairs wants to reach out to students with tips they can consider in managing the emotional and mental part of these events. If you have concerns beyond what we are discussing here, don't hesitate to reach out to us at studentserv@upei.ca.

- 1) **Get physically prepared.** UPEI, the [provincial government](#), and the [Canadian Red Cross](#) have information on how to get physically prepared for extreme weather events. By taking the time to follow these guidelines you not only reduce your risk and reduce the demand on responders, but you will also be reducing your anxiety by exercising some control over the aspects of the situation that can be controlled.
- 2) **Get the facts.** It is easy to let our imagination run away with what could go wrong (psychologists refer to this process as catastrophizing, and it's not healthy) or focus on what social media presents. Much like you would for your course work and papers, practice some critical thinking and go to reliable and verifiable sources with actual expertise.
- 3) **Acknowledge your emotions.** It's ok to experience all sorts of emotions – fear, anxiety, grief, anger, frustration – and different people will experience different things (some might even be excited to see what it's like). Acknowledging and accepting that we have these feelings is important. Once aware of our feelings, we can then exercise caution about letting our feelings make our decisions for us. Journaling can be a good way to be more aware of our feelings, to keep a record of how our feelings change, and to give some practice in expressing them in a contained way. It's also important to recognize that different people will have different feelings even in similar circumstances. No set of feelings is more valid than another (but we are responsible for how we act on them).
- 4) **Build, maintain, and use social connections.** We are inherently social beings and connection with other people can help us feel better and safer, in the sharing of common experiences. If you are having a hard time – reach out. If you are doing ok, look for friends, classmates, neighbours who are struggling and offer help – it'll be good for both helper and helpee. You can also maintain your sense of connection by seeking out family and loved ones - even when they are elsewhere – they'll probably be happy to hear from you.
- 5) **Practice some trust and faith.** Any event comes with some measure of unknowns and worries. For students, this includes concerns about how events will impact their academic careers. UPEI will work with you to minimize these impacts. Once the physical event has passed, make sure you connect with the university about how you were affected – early intervention is much easier than trying to make up for something after marks are submitted.

If you'd like to read more, here are some resources:

<https://cpa.ca/psychology-works-fact-sheet-coping-with-emergencies-disasters-and-violent-events/>

<https://www.webmd.com/anxiety-panic/features/hope-hurricanes-emotional-survival-tips>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/disasters-response/hurricane-preparation>

For official weather reports, visit the Environment and Climate Change Canada website at https://weather.gc.ca/city/pages/pe-5_metric_e.html

If you haven't already, download [UPEI SAFE](#), UPEI's official safety app, from the App Store or Google Play to receive push notifications. Learn more about UPEI SAFE at <https://www.upei.ca/upei-safe>

Follow local media outlets for reports and directions from municipal and/or provincial officials. The PEI Public Safety Division's Facebook and X (Twitter) sites are updated often, especially during an emergency.